

## VIII FINAL THOUGHTS

Paul Needham

We have reached a clear overall understanding of the object called *SNML*, that is of the complete three-dimensional physical object. If housed in a cabinet of curiosities, its proper place would be among the chimeras: it is a hybrid construction of seventeenth- and twenty-first-century materials and actions, purporting to belong entirely to the seventeenth century. And indeed, *SNML* does deserve a permanent home, where it can continue to be consulted as a study piece. The results outlined in this present book are still, however definite, partial, and there is more to learn.

As a printed book forgery, *SNML* is an unusually complex object, its falseness embodied and presented not simply in its printed text, but also in the paper on which it was printed, in its binding, its signature of "Galileo", its "Prince Cesi" book stamps, and most conspicuously of all, its moon drawings. But is it a clever forgery? I am not convinced, despite being someone who managed to be fooled by both its printing and its paper. I am happier in saying that this reflects poorly on me than that it reflects well on the makers. Consider: from the time that a serious problem with the authenticity of *SNML* arose (in Nick Wilding's e-mail mentioning a second copy of *Sidereus nuncius*, with dubious moon etchings, that Marino Massimo De Caro put on the market in 2005), to the time absolute proof was found that *SNML* is forged, only three weeks passed, 10 to 31 May 2012. The necessary catalyst was the creation of a state of doubt. Beyond this, my own opinion, which admittedly cannot be tested, is that there are some people experienced in letterpress printing – I can think of a few strong candidates – who, if they had been shown *SNML* in 2005, might well have spotted right away, with no more apparatus than perhaps a magnifier, that the work had not been printed from moveable type.

In any case, we now see that *SNML* was not betrayed by a single fatal flaw; fatal flaws abound. To stay only with the printed surface itself: Wilding noted the deep, dentated impressions made by what purported to be shoulder ink in *SNML*, impressions that with true typographic printing ought not to have been there at all. In *Galileo Makes a Book* (pp. 181–182) I had discussed and illustrated a particular Jupiter-moon diagram, where *SNML* presents the diagram as correctly printed, whereas by my line of argument, that diagram in *SNML* should have lacked one of the moon asterisks. I wrote that "we have no convincing explanation" for this anomaly. In principle, the very act of typing those words, in 2009 or 2010, could and should have made me very uneasy, and so have set in train the process of unraveling the falsities embodied in *SNML*. It did not: but obviously that is due not to the cleverness of the makers of *SNML*, but rather to my own failure to consider all possibilities

inherent in the anomaly I had noticed. In chapter II above (p. 30, point 7) I also discuss the complete disproof of *SNML* embodied in the three-times-used damaged capital *L* in *Sidereus nuncius*, and in that case I actually recall the circumstances under which I forgot to verify the evidence of the *Ls* against what we see in *SNML*.

Perhaps the smallest *SNML* anomaly which, if noticed, would have raised strong doubt about authenticity is point 6 in the same chapter, concerning frisket bite on D6r of many copies. The slipped frisket which developed as printing of this forme was well under way, blocked off in particular the first letter of the first line, *Q*; and of the second line, *m*. In *SNML*, but unnoticed by me when I studied this phenomenon, the *Q* appears to be intact, but the left stroke of the *m* on line 2 appears to be cropped at the top. A slipped frisket could not have created this disparity: if the *m* was occluded by the frisket, so too must be the *Q*. It seems to me very probable, almost certain, that at this place *SNML* was derived directly from the 1964 Domus Galilaeana facsimile. That facsimile was based on photographs of the copy at the Osservatorio astronomico di Brera in Milan. In the Brera copy the frisket bite is substantial, blocking off the upper half of the *Q* on line 1; the serif of the left stroke of the following *u*; and the *m* of “met” on line 2. However, an early reader restored the upper half of the *Q* by pen; he left alone the missing upper serifs of the *u* and the *m*. It is this anonymous reader’s restoration that was transmitted into the Domus Galilaeana facsimile, and from there into *SNML*. Yet somehow, while gathering information on the frisket state of this page in more than eighty copies, I forgot to look closely at *SNML*.

These failures to pursue (until late May 2012) typographic anomalies in *SNML* could be put in a category labelled “oversights” or “missed opportunities”. Yet they are all indebted to an initial failure of mine, which is considerably more disconcerting to encounter: one that may be labelled “unconscious collaboration in forgery”. This is the appropriate place to bring it under the glass. I first examined *SNML* on Monday 4 February 2008, in the Rare Book & Manuscript Library of Columbia University, where I had it side by side with Columbia’s own copy of *Sidereus nuncius*. At the time, I had almost no acquaintance with this edition. I knew that Horst Bredekamp had argued, in *Galilei der Künstler*, for the authenticity of the moon drawings in this copy, but had not yet read his argument. And of course, I saw on the title-page of *SNML* the bold inscription “*Io Galileo Galilei f.*”

On that day, I gave special attention to the watermarks in the adjacent copies. I saw that the Columbia copy was watermarked with an Anchor in circle watermark in the first sheet, and an LA monogram (difficult to make out, as the letters were divided in the fold) in the remaining sheets. In *SNML* I saw an LA monogram in all sheets. It was apparent that the LA watermarks in the Columbia *Sidereus* and in *SNML*, though very similar, were consist-

ently different. The simplest earmark is that in the Columbia copy the termination of the staff of the L is in clear outline, with three strokes forming an open inverted triangle (and so it is, as I eventually found, in all ordinary-paper copies). In *SNML* the same termination is filled in, perhaps because of build-up of fibres on the mould, giving the appearance of a fuzzy inverted triangle.

I pointed out the difference in watermarks to Richard Lan, who had brought *SNML* to Columbia; and he told me about several typographic variants within copies of *Sidereus nuncius* that had been noted by Horst Bredekamp. One of these differences as I recall (at least, I noticed it while at Columbia) is that on A3v the catchword is mis-set in *SNML* (*inum*) but corrected in the Columbia copy (*nium*). It was at this point that I formed a hypothesis: *SNML* could be a collection of proof printings of *Sidereus nuncius*, printed on a different paper supply, perhaps a remnant left over from some earlier job in the printing shop. If so, in the case of all variants that might appear, *SNML* should show the earlier state.

There is an obvious alternative to this hypothesis: if the paper of *SNML* differs from other copies of *Sidereus nuncius*, that is a strong hint that it is a forgery. I suspect that I never in the next years gave serious attention to the alternative because the variant typographic states found in *SNML*, though not large in number, did seem to be earlier than the states found in many genuine copies. The most significant case is that of A3v, just mentioned, in the inner forme of sheet A, the last sheet to be printed and thus closely datable to 9–10 March 1610. Besides the catchword variant *inum – nium*, there is another variant at the end of the first line of text: *vna – vnà*. Here too the sequence is clear: in the earlier state, besides the lack of a grave accent on *a* (corresponding to a general setting convention in *Sidereus nuncius* in the treatment of long final vowels), the letter *n* also appears to be damaged. From my copy census, it developed that page A3v exists in three successive states, reflecting in-press corrections as the sheets were printed. In the first state we have uncorrected *vna* and *inum*; in the second, *vnà* corrected and *inum* uncorrected; in the third state, both settings are corrected. *SNML* belongs to the earliest state, attested by only four genuine copies, those at the Universitätsbibliothek Graz, the University of Oklahoma, the Buffalo & Erie County Library, and the Huntington Library (copy 2, acquired as part of the Burndy library). It is curious to note that three of these copies have early Rome provenances, while the fourth (Oklahoma) was once in Galileo's own hands, for he presented it to the poet Gabrello Chiabrera with a handsome inscription. As my census of recorded copies and their variants grew, the "rarity" of *SNML*'s readings became increasingly clear, and so *SNML* seemed to grow apace in authenticity.

This returns us to the question of whether the forgery is clever. The three variant states of page A3v were not in the bibliographical literature on Galileo. They emerged in the course of my copy census, and so were published for the first time in *Galileo Makes a Book* (pp. 179–180). Did the forgers know already of this variant-sequence, and consciously choose the earliest state? If so, that was clever. It appears that digital images of the Graz copy could have been available in 2003–2004, and so this is a real possibility. Alternatively, the forgers may simply have been fortunate in using as their copy source for this page either the Graz copy, or some other copy, not recorded by me, containing the earliest text state. Nick Wilding has tracked down, in a French bookdealer’s catalogue of 2005, a copy of *Sidereus nuncius* that De Caro states was his source for the SNML forgery, but at this writing the location of that copy has not been verified so it is not yet available for study. When this copy eventually comes back into the light, we will want to know the state of its A3v.

For me, there is an almost poetic unity of place in the cycle of my encounters with SNML. On a bleak winter day in 2008, in the rare book room of Columbia University, with two (apparently two) copies of *Sidereus nuncius* sitting on a desk, I began to form a fantasy. Four years and four months later, on a brilliant day in late spring, in the same room, with the same books brought before the same (but now better-schooled) eyes, the fantasy died and I saw SNML truly, face to face. The indispensable spur to this second visit was the persistent skepticism of Nick Wilding, to whom my debt is fundamental.

Irene Brückle

When we reexamined the book, we speculated on how many specialists and how much time it had taken to produce a forgery of such unprecedented quality. Meanwhile we know, as reported in the December 16, 2013 article in *The New Yorker* by Nicholas Schmidle, that it required a team of people, some knowledgeable enough to be considered amateur scholars, others professional artisans and artists, the latter perhaps with a knack for restoration (reflecting a queer variant of the literal meaning of the word), and roughly two years of production in between several cities and countries. Whatever information may still be coaxed from De Caro and his complicit followers may reveal more about the forgery production, though perhaps never the whole truth. What remains is the, perhaps somewhat academic, exercise of correlating the technical details revealed in this volume with the machinations alluded to in the Schmidle article, such as the methods of creating characteristics that he associated with an aged look of the paper.

Two different types of apparently similar expertise compete in such a forgery study: the expertise of the forger who has the intention to fool, and the expertise of those who work to uncover it. De Caro's expertise went far enough to pass as true scholarship for a while. He seems to have accumulated his knowledge by trial and error, always following what proved to be the more successful lines of fakes he threw on the market. In comparing the Padua *Compasso* and the SNML, it appears that he must have improved on the paper production when he realized that previous forgeries drew suspicion because of their handling qualities, as also indicated in Schmidle's article. Because he is a forger who aimed at imitation and not a scholar interested in probing technical details beyond those that produce a lucrative effect, some escaped his notice. He went far enough to have fitting watermarks produced, but chose the wrong fibre. Why did he choose cotton linters instead of the historically appropriate bast fibres he could have procured with reasonable effort? He could also have easily diminished some of the flaws resulting from the polymer plate printing, but he didn't.

De Caro invested in numerous details to create the complex picture of an aged book enriched with unique and puzzling features that would convince the viewer. That the slim forgery is snuggly inserted into the authentic 17th-century Sammelband that makes up the bulk of the object was an element calculated to shield the forgery. In this aspect, he may have learned from the less cleverly constructed and presumably earlier Padua *Compasso* that lies "naked" between 18th-century book covers (imitating, no doubt, the many pastiche objects made of a text block inserted in a historic and sellable book cover). Inside the

forged SNML pamphlet, the forgery marks – the aged look, the signature, printing and drawings, and the soiling – together produced an authentic effect that confused even external specialists invited to examine it during the recent campaign. Oddities of aging and previous restoration must be factored in when studying old books. In this, De Caro may have learned from his experience with the Padua *Compasso*, which bears crude signs of aging and curiously incompetent repairs that seem too obvious to fool anyone. Not just the original production, but the aging, use and repair must match a viewer's expectation, as related by Nicholas Barker in another case.<sup>1</sup> The forged Padua *Compasso* relates to SNML as an apprentice's piece relates to a masterpiece – that is, until other book examples of similarly fiendish origin become known and make a more complete genealogy.

Once the first sign of forgery was revealed to us in May 2012, all of odd characteristics previously accepted as authentic were cancelled out. Once we knew SNML was a forgery, we could not possibly go back and see it again as being authentic. This makes it more difficult to explain the former success of the fake. It is also not explained by remembering that the approach of the forger is fully unregulated, whereas the forgery-researcher is required to maintain a strict protocol in the choice of methods and materials used to elucidate, while simultaneously physically protecting the object. Overlooked features led to presumptions which, combined, created the overall effect.

To sum up the recent experience: there was the emotional disappointment that results from uncovering this unpleasant truth and, ultimately more significantly, the satisfaction of defrauding or uncovering pertinent details of the fake. This forms the solid ground on which we now stand. The practical consequences for the inspection of future suspicious cases are elucidated by the chapters of the present publication. We hope that the lessons learned will help others to avoid the same traps in their study of old books.

1 The complexity of what makes a convincing appearance of aged historic materials is well illustrated in Barker's comments on a facsimile that posed as a 16th-century tract produced in the 19th century by John Harris. Barker reports: "Anybody [...] would look at the book and swear that it was a piece of 16th-century printing, and yet, when you look at the end, it says in tiny letters 'J. Harris facsim:'. Now the interesting thing, and probably the most effective form of deceit to our eye, lies in the fact that most people in the 19th century washed early printed books when they came into their hands. So when we look at this book in its Bedford binding it gives the impression of a piece of 16th-century printing which has had all the guts, the 16th-century-ness of it washed out, and we don't see that it is merely Harris's idea of what a piece of 16th-century printing looked like in his time". N. Barker, The forgery of printed documents, in: *Fakes and Frauds. Varieties of deception in print and manuscript*, New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press, 1996, p. 109–123.

Horst Bredekamp

The most astonishing phenomenon of the *SNML* that made and makes me perplex are investments into the darkness of potentially going unnoticed. This is also true for the drawings. They are seemingly a test of how far the forger could go. Copying drawings can be hazardous, but the forger took this risk. I have tried to detect the stylistic patterns that speak against or in favor of the opinion that Galileo himself was at work in the drawings for the *SNML*.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to his opinion that they were a product of Galileo's own hand, in view of the new evidence, the opposite conclusion must be drawn: The forger studied Galileo's style up to a level at which he was able to simulate it even on paper that Galileo did not use. The forger must have studied the Florentine drawings that show different phases of the moon to a degree that allowed him to sketch the new drawings in the *SNML* with remarkable intuition.

This alone is astonishing, but it does not yet enter upon the second level of departure from the norms of forgery. What is once again most disturbing is the precision of minute details that can only be perceived after long examinations. These are shaped by a number of stylistic tools. Characteristic is the strange way in which the shadow in the huge crater on the moondrawings is defined: with rather thick lines which go horizontally from left to right like thumbs (Fig. 1). They are rather strange, and would have once again formulated an element of originality in the forger's product, if not one of the Florentine drawings would not show similar structures used to define the deep darkness of night. This element had not been observed before I became aware of it while working on *Galilei der Künstler*.<sup>2</sup> This means that a most characteristic element of the drawings in *SNML* was in danger of not being perceived as a characteristic element of Galileo's hand. Thus it was a problematic investment, running the risk of not being taken as an element of authentication, but instead as denying the authenticity of these drawings.

The most obscure and up to now unexplainable investment is the presence of spots of dark material on top of the drawings in *SNML* (Fig. 2).<sup>3</sup> One needs a lens to detect them, and I discovered them only on the second day of this research on the drawings. Even if they are seen, it does not necessarily become clear that they are related to significant lines on the engravings.<sup>4</sup> Simulations of the possible manner of using these dark spots as a tool for shaping

1 Bredekamp, 2007, pp. 155–174.

2 Bredekamp, 2007, pp. 173; *Galileo's O*, 2011, Vol. I, pp. 91–93.

3 Bredekamp, 2007, pp. 198–205; *Galileo's O*, 2011, Vol. I, pp. 94–97.

4 Ibid.

the engravings demonstrate the perfection of this idea. Thus the forger must have invented an unprecedented way of reproduction, which he then materialized through the tiny little spots on top of the drawings, not knowing if they would ever be detected or not.

I have learnt, in a bitter way, what I knew before, but not in this concrete sense: that phenomena can be looked at from different perspectives and that from different viewpoints they tell completely different narratives.



*Fig. 1: SNML,  
p. 10v, lower moon detail.*



*Fig. 2: SNML,  
p. 9v, moon detail.*

